[57] Chapter 4

The Court of the Mogho Naba. Tribute and Payments Due. Obligations of Mossi Subjects to their Naba.

Morning Honors Paid to the Emperor of the Mossi

The council of the emperor of the Mossi is held every morning in front of an antechamber called zango which opens out upon a very large courtyard.

The Mossi have for a long time regarded the sun as a "god." Wend'pous yan, "God shows himself," refers to the rising of the sun, but it is used in a figurative sense to refer to the emergence of the Mogho Naba. This illustrates the regard held by the Mossi people for their chief since he is compared to the star of daylight and thus to a "god."

The Mogho Naba appears each morning dressed in an ample red robe and with a red gourmousga (a kind of burnoose) folded and thrown over his shoulders. On his head he wears a cap, a fez, topped with a wazourfou sebré (literally, "silver paper" [streamers], that is to say, silver amulet). Red represents the light that comes with the appearance of the sun, while the silver on the cap represents the brilliance of the star itself.

Before the time set for the start of the ceremony, the three sogon'kassemsé (great servitors) bring into the courtyard the [58] cushion, nagpouré, and all the other insignia of office. As soon as the Mogho Naba appears, they arise and make a snapping sound with thumb and index finger to indicate that the naba is coming.

"Wend'pous yan" is also cried out by the gagando and luinsé (drummers) as soon as His Majesty sits down. The Bend'Naba [chief drummer] is the only one who does not beat his drum; instead, he rubs his finger back and forth over the waxed part of the drum head to imitate the roar of the lion. Four or five young men bearing loaded rifles take their places in front of the emperor.

Honors are rendered to the Mogho Naba in the following order.

1. The Samandé Naba, Baloum Naba, Wedranga Naba, and Simandé Nabila, as well as the Zusoabin'kassanga (chief eunuch and guardian of the emperor's household), are the first to greet His Majesty and to inquire about his health.

776 2. We owe this list of formulas to the kindness of Fr. Thueux, the European who undoubtedly knows the Mossi language most intimately. May we express here our hearty thanks.

sacrifice includes a curse against enemies.

776 Beyond these wishes, however, no prayer is addressed to God
782 directly; no sacrifice is offered to Him without mention of spirits. Yet, as we shall see in the following chapter, the invocations of the sacrificial formula are addressed mostly to God, and when the sacrifice is over all those who have participated in it greet the sacrificer with these words: "May God accept your sacrifice; may God receive it!"

776 But who is this God? Is he one or many? Has he a body, or is he spirit? Where does he dwell? So many questions which a Mossi has never asked himself and which leave him momentarily bewildered. "Is God one or many?" "I don't know" is the usual answer. If one insists, he says that God is one. But a difficulty arises: "Why then, in sacrifices, do you invoke God-king male and God-king female?" Again: "I don't know; this is what our fathers said."

776 Does God have a body? Yes, assuredly, for only a highly practiced
821 intelligence can conceive of a pure spirit. But what is this body like? "I don't know." Where is God? "Everywhere." But does he occupy a special place? "God is the sun."

776 Do they identify God with the sun? It is difficult for us to establish
782 a settled opinion on the subject. They do seem to grant the identifi-
821 cation, and in the course of sacrifices—after all, their sacrificial formulas must fit their concept of divinity—they offer God water for his rising and pour it to the east, water for his retiring and pour it to the west. In a quarrel the weaker party says: "God is my witness that I have not harmed you; God will pay you back in kind," and points toward the sun. Sacrifices are never /80/ offered in the middle of the night; but then they are not made in the middle of the day either, and they may be offered in the evening, when the sun has dipped below the horizon. The names for God and for the sun are
776 different. Wendé is the proper name for God, Wennam indicates
821 God's power (Wende nam). These words have no plural and thus indicate a belief in God's oneness. The sun is called Winniga, or

776 Wintoro at noon when it scorches the earth (Winniga toro). It must be
821 added, however, that sometimes the sun is called Na /Naba/ Wendé, "God-king." At night God is supposed to retire into his hut, since the sun is no longer visible, and yet he continues to be everywhere. "If you commit an offense during the night, God knows about it." The Mossi are likely to say when the sun stands at the zenith, "It is God who makes the sun scorch us today." Thus they do seem, in practice, to make a distinction between God and the sun. The sun is God's dwelling, but it is not God. But what inconsistency in all this!

Natural phenomena are sometimes attributed to God. Lightning kills those who have done evil, it kills livestock wrongly obtained through fraud or theft, and it is sent in punishment by God ... unless it is sent by an enemy. Amulets and fetishes derive their power from
776 God, as already mentioned, and the same applies to medicinal remedies. Illness is usually attributed to an evil spirit who must be
[753] appeased, but sometimes it is also attributed to God. The Mossi do not seem to grant a soul to inanimate objects, but only to animate beings: plants, animals, men. Yet, as a rule, inexplicable or abnormal phenomena are attributed to spirits dwelling in inanimate objects.

There are three kinds of spirits: the tisé (plural of tiga, "tree"), who dwell exclusively in trees; the kikirsi (plural of kikiriga), or spirits proper; and the tangamma (plural of tangandé), the protective spirits of the villages who dwell in sacred groves.

The tisé reside preferably in those trees which stand near the huts, but some of them also dwell in the bush. They have a special liking for the tamarind tree and bastard mahogany, but they are not at all fond of the doubalé, which shelters bats. At night they leave their dwelling and go into the huts. Their bodies are human in form, but invisible to the common run of mankind. They are much taller and fatter than men, and they are black and walk with their feet up in the air and their heads down to the ground.

776 At night they wander about, and their presence is betrayed by a
753 darkening of the doorway; they are so fat that they blot out the light. Woe to the man who has no water in his soukala, who has saved no millet beer! The tiga who comes and finds nothing causes pimples to grow all over the man's body; this is the illness characteristic of the tisé. He is fortunate if he gets away with so little, for the tisé can afflict him with many other diseases or even kill him. If the tiga manages to touch someone, the place touched will swell; if someone

777 may hold in store. Wednesday is unreservedly bad, and you must not start a job or leave for a trip on that day. Thursday and Friday are propitious to weddings, especially Friday. On Saturday the sorcerers take the day off and hold no consultations. In addition, every individual has his own lucky day and his unlucky day, which he must know and bear in mind.

778 787 823 Some stones are said to have fallen from heaven. On the day when they fall, the village chief immediately covers all the jars in his hut which contain charms. If he knocks one down in his haste, he will die within the year. These stones are held sacred. Those who can lift them /100/ have nothing to fear, but those who cannot are soon to die. People may also interrogate such a stone, whose reply is considered favorable if they manage to lift it, unfavorable if they cannot [788] do so. Passersby toss millet stalks onto the stone, or twigs cut along the way, or sometimes cowries, to procure success in their endeavors.

821 787 Comets are omens of war or of the death of a great chief. When Halley's comet appeared on the horizon, the chickens, goats, and sheep had a bad time of it. It was necessary to ward off all the possible misfortunes. It is true that the comet was magnificent, spreading for several days from one end of the sky nearly to another, and it is understandable that the natives should be upset. We have heard that many people were troubled in our civilized countries, where the comet could not be seen in all its splendor. In spite of all those sacrifices, the chief of one of the principal cantons in the province, the naba of Pwitenga, died that very year!

000 We must limit our enumeration, and these few examples, which could easily be multiplied, suffice to make clear the role of amulets and superstitions in the life of this people.

801 One further word on superstitions. The reader may have noticed that the numbers three and four and their composites have recurred constantly according to the sex of the person spoken of. Three is reserved for men and four for women. In the sacrifices, God-king male is called three times. God-king female four times. The cord of the charm has three or four knots according to sex; mothers mourn their children for 33 or 44 days. A dead man receives 333 or 3, 333 cowries, a dead woman 444 or 4, 444, etc.

302 Every time a native changes his status, his hair must be removed. Babies are shaved before they are given a name, girls before they come to their husband, women when they are transferred to a new

821 825 Water in general and rain in particular are a blessing in this sun-scorched land. Crocodiles are reputed to attract water to their dwelling-place. To kill a crocodile may not necessarily amount to homicide, but it amounts at least to drying out a watercourse or pond, for the crocodiles will leave the place and the water will leave with them. If rain is too long delayed, the crop will not have time to ripen; if it falls too heavily, especially at the beginning and at the end of the winter season, weeds will choke the millet, or the flowers will fall before the fruit is formed.

789 829 Rain is, therefore, desired or feared according to the circumstances, and the power to make rain and to ward it off devolves upon the naba, who rules on the life and death of his subjects. In truth every powerful man is believed to possess this power, and how often they requested me to make rain! Is it not true that Whites can do anything? They are related to the ancestral spirits, their color proves it! Do they not come from the land of water? Did they not emerge from the water? In spite of my assertions that God alone can make rain, that one must pray for it, their skeptical smiles made it plain that they did not believe me.

789 The naba has the charm, the talisman, to draw rain. All he need do when a storm threatens is to take from his hut a certain jar full of certain roots and fill it with water to overflowing. On the other hand, if he wishes to ward off rain, he burns another kind of root, and the wind carries the smoke in the direction where the naba wishes to send the clouds; or else he hangs a cow's or horse's tail to a stick by a thread, and the wind tosses it, thus driving the clouds away. This is why the naba sends one of his men to market when the rainy season draws near, to gather karite fruit from each woman there, because the pits are used to make the charm and must be obtained in this fashion. If a person other than the naba has tried to make rain and failed, he attributes his failure to someone more powerful than himself; if the naba fails, no one says anything about it, or else it is said that the naba did not really wish to attract or to ward off the rain.

821 Every storm is accompanied by lightning, which often kills people in this land of violent thunderstorms. Its effects are attributed to an evil spirit, to an enemy who can send lightning if he knows the proper tim, or to God Himself. Lightning strikes thieves and murderers; it is a punishment. If it does not kill the thief himself, it kills the proceeds of the theft, the stolen horse or sheep. It never kills a person without reason.

789 /103/ Happily, it is possible to avoid lightning. To achieve this,
821 it is necessary to find in the bush a white substance rather similar to hyena droppings which the natives call "rain dung," as well as certain tree roots. Part of these roots is left to soak in water for three days, and the rest is burned to ashes. A chicken is sacrificed to the tim. Then the water in which the roots have steeped is used to cook the millet mush, and the sauce is made with baobab leaves. All the soukala dwellers must eat this millet mush, and every one of them is marked on the back and chest with a cross of ashes mixed with karite butter. The horse and donkey, alone among the animals, are similarly marked on the back, chest, and inside the mouth. The huts are marked on the east side, the direction from which the rain comes, and above the entrance. Now there is nothing to be feared. We do feel, however, that lightning-rods are more effective.

759 All these tim, medicinal remedies, amulets, talismans, and
756 superstitious recipes, are prescribed either by true doctors who actually know the properties of herbs and effect real cures or by sorcerers. The doctors are often consulted. Since they specialize in certain diseases, they are consulted for those diseases alone. Those who have been cured by a medicine willingly make it known to friends who are afflicted with the same illness. The doctors are as numerous as the diseases which afflict mankind.

278 Some doctors are not merely healers but also poisoners, and they
674 are greatly feared. The surest way to get rid of an enemy is to consult them, but their fees are high. They have slow poisons which consume the victim gradually and the overwhelming ones which kill in a few hours. They put them in drinks, in millet mush, or more
754 often in kola nuts. There are also people, sorcerers rather than doctors, who claim the power to kill at a distance and who know how to practice sympathetic magic. Their prestige has waned since the French occupation because they have not managed to kill the Whites who settled in the country; but they say that our tim are more powerful than theirs.

754 The sorcerers are also numerous. There are those who take up the
756 call of their own accord and those who are born sorcerers. The former
791 are the bagré and seuya; the latter the tibo, bartibo, waongo, and nyonnyonsé. Pardon us these barbaric words, but they are impossible to translate.

791 The bagre is the nice, innocuous kind of sorcerer, who helps the
756 poor for a penny of two. He is consulted about everything. For example, what does the future hold? Will fire destroy my huts or won't

794 lightning as well, which he can do only if he is the Sky-Atmosphere.
[82] "The natural phenomena," he says, "are sometimes attributed to God. Lightning kills those who have done evil, it kills the animal ill-gotten through fraud or theft, and it is God who sends lightning as a punishment..." Thus, Ouendé, while being the sun, is also the Sky-Atmosphere, and other things too, for he has characteristics that go
[797] beyond the sun divinity and the sky divinity. We must not forget here that the Allah of the Moslems is well known among the Mossi and has his established representatives there (Yarsé of Mandé origin, Peul, etc.), or temporary ones (merchants who have come from the north or south, Soninnké /Soninke/, Songhay, Dyoula). Thus, for a long time, /33/ the Moslem conception of god could and has, in effect, rubbed off on the sun-atmosphere-god of the Mossi. The latter might have waged war on the Songhay sultans who led religious crusades against them, yet it is also true that they were content to bestow upon their most important god the remarkable characteristics that struck them and that they admired in the Moslem god. Thus, Ouendé gradually became more and more a supreme god, although it would seem that in the beginning, he was only a sun god and an atmosphere god, first separated, later fused with a predominance of the sun god element.

To summarize, it has been well established that one finds the cult of the sun among the Mossi, along with many other elements as
[71] we have just shown. I have since found this cult among the Dorhosié (1922) and the Gouro (1923). However, among the Gouro, it is relegated to a few fetishists and does not interest the bulk of the population. Among the Dorhosié, on the contrary, it interests the vast multitude and occasions a solemn sacrifice made in the winter, at the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. Among these people, however, the sun divinity has not become a leading divinity as it has among the Mossi. It is one divinity among several and is rather subordinate to the cult of the Earth-brush and that of the Sky-atmosphere. Moreover, I am persuaded that more far-reaching studies among all the branches of the Voltaic population would uncover, here and there, the cult of the sun, as among the Mossi, the Gourounsi, the Dorhosié, etc.

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11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964
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French Forces were present there. The official Vichy radio began broadcasts urging discipline, increased production, and "patriotic cooperation in making the Federation [of French West Africa] a military bastion against the encroachment of its British neighbors."[88] In response, local officials ordered Mossi chiefs to provide laborers to build trenches and fortifications between the two areas. The Free French, for their part, used the Gold Coast as a center for the distribution of anti-Pétain propaganda, and tried to employ returning Mossi labor migrants as couriers. The majority of these young men were not interested in politics, however, and those who were prevailed upon to take propaganda leaflets into Mossi country simply discarded them as soon as they crossed the border.

The pressures, counter-pressures, and anxieties of this period were apparently too much for Mogho Naba Kom II, who died on March 12, 1942. By the next morning, countless rumors to the effect that the Mogho Naba had committed suicide had spread as far as the Gold Coast. The most widespread rumor was that the Mogho Naba's anti-Pétainist views had become clear to the administration. In reprisal, he was "placed under surveillance on Boisson's orders and separated from his subjects. He died solemnly by his own hand after having summoned his son and commanded him not to take office 'until the true French should return.'"[89] Another widely circulated rumor, probably originated by Moslems, was that the Catholic missionaries, freed from the restraints of Paris, had tried to compel the Mogho Naba to divorce his many wives and become monogamous. The Mogho Naba allegedly could not comply with this demand because it would have been a severe violation of Mossi tradition for a royal wife to become the wife of any other man while her husband was still alive. Faced with this dilemma, the rumor said, the Mogho Naba committed suicide.

The official French report on the Mogho Naba's death reveals that the administration was aware of these and other rumors and of their potential influence on the behavior of the Mossi people. The report also shows that the French officials believed, and credited the Mossi with believing, the classical superstition that "The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes." The report states:

> Over the last few years, the health of Saidou Congo [Mogho Naba Kom II] has been impaired by heart trouble, and it was a heart attack which carried him off at about 11 P.M. on March 12th.
>
> The natives have no explanation for sudden deaths, and attribute them either to supernatural intervention or to poison. Besides, two phenomena had occurred just then to strike the imagination: there had been a total eclipse of the moon on the night of March 2d to 3d, which announced,

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according to the Mossi, the imminent death of an important chief; secondly, a meteor had passed unexpectedly over Ouagadougou between 8 and 9 P.M. [on March 12th], vividly impressing the Mogho Naba himself.

It is quite possible that the emotions induced by these phenomena aggravated the heart condition that felled him. Certain people have maintained that the Mogho Naba, being opposed to all foreign domination and convinced that serious developments were imminent, voluntarily commited suicide by poison in order to elude them. So far, there is no proof that such a rumor has really been adrift. The matter is under strict investigation.[60]

The Mossi people practiced as best they could the traditional rituals connected with the death of a Mogho Naba. During the interregnum, however, the administration did not permit the usual chaos, ritual or otherwise. One administration report states: "Young people tried to steal things in the market, taking advantage of the old customs, but they were checked."[61] A later report adds that the traditions of the Napoko and the Kourita were honored, and that one hundred persons were arrested for the ritual larceny of small objects.

The traditional Mossi authorities allegedly requested that the deceased Mogho Naba, as one who had worn the Legion of Honor, be given full military honors. This required the placing of his body in a coffin so that the funeral cortege could move through the streets, a fact which introduced a new ritual element in royal funerals. Once this ceremony was over, however, the representatives of the administration withdrew, and the body was buried according to customary rites.

The traditional electoral college then proceeded with the task of choosing a new ruler. The choice was between Issoufou Congo, Kom's eldest son, who was then a lieutenant in the French Colonial Army in the Ivory Coast, and his younger brother, Etienne Congo, chief of the Doulougou district. With the administration's permission, the college elected Issoufou Congo. He took the title "Sagha" (the second Mogho Naba to bear that name), and was installed with traditional ceremonies.

The message Sagha sent to the French High Commissioner bears quoting. Like the traditional speeches of newly elected Mogho Nanamse, it was believed by the Mossi people to contain subtle jibes at enemies, praises to benefactors and friends, and portents of future plans. The Mogho Naba said:

> At the moment when I take command of the Mossi people, I must thank you for having placed me on the throne of my father. I give you assurance of my fidelity toward France in all circumstances. Be assured by this testimony that my father will remain for me an honored person and a guide. I will walk in the footsteps of my father. In these difficult times, my people and I re-